



Save the Children
Norway



Centre for Youth Integration

We know best

"Outreach Work of the Centre for Youth Integration"

- Best Practice Guide -





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Introductory

This publication is derived from the seven-year development program of the „Outreach work“ with the street involved children which is implemented by the Association „Center for Youth Integration“¹. This best practice guide is intended for organizations and professionals who implement or want to initiate implementation of activities aimed to raise the level of social inclusion of street involved children.

The publication illustrates the development of the Outreach work of CYI explaining the importance and role of this program as the key component in working with street involved children. It relies on the wide range of knowledge and experience CYI accumulated over the several years of building a support system for this target group.

„CYI“ is an association founded in 2004 in Belgrade, Serbia. Shortly after its establishment the CYI has directed the implementation of its activities towards street involved children on the territory of the city of Belgrade. After the initial outreach visits very first actions aimed at this population were initiated. The Outreach program has been evolving ever since. The first residential program “Drop in center” has been established by the CYI in the year of 2007. In subsequent years, the CYI has worked to develop a local network of services and support programs for its target population.

Since 2007 the CYI has been involved in The Regional Child Trafficking Response Program in South Eastern Europe (hereinafter CTRP), which has been designed and implemented by international organization „Save the Children“.

The initial CTRP phase lasted for three years starting from 2002. The focus of this phase was addressing the problem of child trafficking, particularly targeting prevention, identification and support to children victims of trafficking. Lessons learned from this phase were that in order to secure a more adequate response to real needs and problems of children at risk or victims of trafficking, a much more rigorous and systematic analysis of the phenomenon on which the program activities could be based upon is needed. Extensive qualitative research based on the CYI’s previous experience in work with street involved children was conducted during the second phase of the CTRP. In the focus of the research were the risks to which children are exposed, as well as the factors which make some children more resilient than others. The results of the research were presented in the publication “Children Speak Out”² in May 2007. In this study a total of 81 persons participated, including street involved children who have been beneficiaries of the CYI programs. This study was an important step towards better understanding of the reasons which bring children out to the streets and the overall conditions they live in. Furthermore, the foundation for the human trafficking risk reduction program design was laid down, a risk to which, as the study demonstrated, this particular group of children was exposed on a daily basis.

Save the Children raised the problem of child trafficking as one of the priority issues within its mandate for the South-East Europe region. Implementation of the third phase of the regional Program for the fight against child trafficking in South-East Europe (CTRP), had began in January 2009. Sustained activities were designed based on knowledge and experience gained in the previous period, as well as on the results of the research realized in the second phase of the program. In the last three years (from 2009 to 2011) the Child Trafficking Response Program aimed to identify effective models and services for support and protection of street involved children, in terms of preventing or reducing the risks of violence, exploitation and abuse, including minimizing the risk of unsafe migration and the risk of trafficking. This publication is one of the results of the long-term cooperation between CYI and *Save the Children*.

1 Association „Centre for Youth Integration“ (<http://www.cim.org.rs>) hereinafter CYI

2 Children speak out - the risk of human trafficking and resilience of children in South East Europe, Nevenka Zegarac, Save the Children UK, Belgrade, 2007

Acknowledgments

This Guide is dedicated to the children who in 2005 lived in a squatted house on Slavija square in Belgrade where the Outreach Program has made its first steps. Experiences they shared with us, their hopes, fears and dreams and all the troubles they struggled with daily bounded us not to give up trying to make Belgrade a better place for them. What we learned from these children, as well as motivation, dedication, knowledge and courage of outreach workers who pursued to improve their living conditions made Belgrade today a better place for them. Therefore, this guide is written with utmost respect for people who have spent over 45.000 hours on the streets with the street involved children.

Inspired by all of you!

Sincerely,

Authors

Section I

Social and institutional context



Legislation and other adopted and ratified documents in Serbia which contribute to better protection of street involved children

The basis and the guiding document for all documents concerning the implementation of the child's rights³, which have been developed or modified in later years, is the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which Serbia ratified on December 18th, 1990⁴.

Since 2004, when the CYI has began working with street involved children, significant progress has been made both in terms of legislation and of the overall social inclusion of these children.

At the very beginning the activities carried out by the CYI did not find the support of the official institutions. The problems the street involved children and young people faced on a daily basis were treated as unsolvable or contingent to the „community culture” from which the children came. At the same time, the prevalent view was that the social welfare system has developed enough services and mechanisms, while civil society organizations do not have the capacity to develop sustainable programs.

The current legislative framework ensures equal participation of civil society organizations in some aspects, thus creating favorable conditions for social inclusion and a more comprehensive planning process of protection and securing of the exercise of the rights of the street involved children. Presented below are some of the most important documents that are a precondition and a starting point for improving the living standards of street involved children.

Law against Discrimination⁵ adopted in 2009 stipulates the general prohibition of discrimination, determines forms and cases of discrimination, as well as protection from discrimination. Discrimination on any grounds is prohibited - race, sex, national or ethnic origin, property, birth, sexual orientation, marital and family status, etc.

Health Insurance Law⁶ provides for free health care to all juveniles particularly singling out Roma community as a particularly vulnerable group, i.e. a group for which it is important to enable more accessible health care and protection.

Law on Social Protection⁷, adopted in March 2011, recognized the “Drop in center” as a daily service in the local community. This law envisages decentralization of services and sets the foundation for more equal partnership between state institutions and civil society organizations.

General Protocol on the Protection of Children from Abuse and Neglect⁸ is one of the most important documents stipulating multi-sector cooperation. Special protocols for professionals in the field of health and social care and members of the Ministry of Internal Affairs support and clarify the implementation of the General Protocol.

3 Adopted by the UN General Assembly, on November 20, 1989

4 More about other documents ratified by the Republic of Serbia can be found at <http://www.mpravde.gov.rs/lt/articles/medjunarodne-aktivnosti-eu-integracije-i-projekti/medjunarodna-pravna-pomoc/multilateralni-ugovori.html>

5 The law can be found at <http://www.ravnopravnost.gov.rs/files/zakon-o-zabrani-diskriminacije.pdf>

6 The law can be found at http://www.rzzo.rs/download/Zakon_o_zdrav_osiguranju.pdf

7 The law can be found at http://www.paragraf.rs/propisi/zakon_o_socijalnoj_zastiti.html

8 The General protocol was approved 2005 by the Government of the Republic of Serbia. The protocol content can be found on <http://www.inkluzija.org/biblioteka/Opstiprotokolzazastituceodzlostavjanjaizanemarivanja.pdf>

Family Law⁹ regulates relations of the child and parents, adoption, foster care, child custody, support, protection from domestic violence, procedures in relation to family relations, personal name, etc. As of 2011, this law reads that young person sixteen years of age may decide independently on specific health interventions and is capable of decision making.¹⁰

In 2005 the institution of Ombudsman¹¹ was introduced into the legal system of the Republic of Serbia by the Act on the Ombudsman, and the following year the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia was adopted confirming the existence of this institution.

There are over 80 laws in force in Serbia which pertain to the rights of the child.¹² In addition to the abovementioned, it is important to mention the following:

- Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography¹³
- Protocol on prevention, suppression and punishment of human trafficking¹⁴, especially of women and children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against transnational organized criminal¹⁵
- Law on juvenile perpetrators of crime and criminal justice protection of minors (2005)
- Minimum Age Convention (1973) and the Worst Forms of Child Labor Convention (1999) - the International Labor Organization (ILO)¹⁶.
- National Action Plan for Children of the Government of the Republic of Serbia¹⁷
- Document *A World Fit for Children*¹⁸

Notwithstanding the progress in legislative reform in Serbia, especially in the last few years, there are problems pertaining to implementation of certain laws, and to exercise of the rights of the members of marginalized groups. Due to the complexity of the situation wherein the street involved children are, as well as the diversity of factors that lead them into the street, the obstacles for implementation of the related rights are far more numerous. Problems noticed in the field, on one side, legal shortcomings and inconsistencies in implementation of particular regulations on the other, clearly demonstrated the need for developing a support system for the children on the ground. That is to say, this marked the beginning of “street” struggle and activism directed not only to direct service provision to children in need, but also at initiating many systemic changes which would allow for easy access to quality service for street involved children.

9 The family law can be found at <http://zakon.co.rs/porodicni-zakon.html>

10 The analysis of the legislation of the Republic of Serbia from the perspective of the rights of the child.

11 More on the institution Obdusman can be read more on <http://www.ombudsman.rs/index.php/lang-sr/o-nama>

12 The analysis of the legislation of the Republic of Serbia from the perspective of the rights of the child.

13 You can find the law confirming the optional protocol, as well as the content of the Protocol on http://www.podaci.net/_z1/3111696/P-pddpdp02v0207.html

14 The protocol can be found on <http://www.osce.org/odihr/19223>

15 Decree on the promulgation of the Law on ratification of Convention against transnational organized crime and the additional protocols can be found here http://www.tuzilastvorz.org.rs/html_trz/PROPISI/konvencija_un_protiv_org_krim_lat.pdf

16 The instructions for the implementation of these protocols can be found at http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---europe/---ro-geneva/---sro-budapest/documents/publication/wcms_168751.pdf

17 NAP is a strategic document of the Government of the Republic of Serbia which defines general public policy for children until 2015 (adopted in 2004)

18 Published by Children Rights Center, 2002.

The vicious circle

The attempts to break from the vicious circle of problems with full realization of rights are confronted with obstacles which often seem insurmountable.

Street involved children are exposed to physical and psychological violence, and they can be exploited and drawn into the chain of human trafficking.

Because of the administrative obstacles and unclear or inefficient bureaucratic procedures these children and their families fail to step out of the circle of crude struggle for survival.

One of the most serious problems we face is the problem of *legal invisibility*. *Legally invisible person* does not exist before the law as it is not recorded in the birth register, thus being precluded from accessing basic rights such as obtaining education diploma, right to marriage, the right to employment, the right to free meal, etc. The laws in force do not offer simple and efficient solutions to this grave problem.¹⁹ Organization PRAXIS²⁰, which, in the last couple of years has been working on protection, improvement and promotion of human rights of refugees and internally displaced persons, in the publication *Legally Invisible Persons in Serbia, still without the solution* (published in June 2011) emphasizes that “legally invisible persons are predominantly members of one ethnic minority group-Roma, while specificities of that group which are relevant to the process of registering with the Birth Register are not taken into account”. This fact taken together with the data the CYI acquired through work with the street involved children that 97 % of the total of identified street involved children are Roma speaks clearly of the their invisibility.

Limited number of adequate training programs for support to *children at risk* on the territory of Belgrade and low level of information on existing services seriously hinders the process of social inclusion of these children and their families.

Insufficient number of professionals of different profiles (education, social workers and health workers) is adequately trained and sensitive to work with street involved children. Unpleasant situations, which according to the words of children happen in contact with the representatives of these institutions, have a negative effect on the motivation of children to encounter official institutions. In this way they, once more, remain outside the system.

The confessions of children that we work with and experience of the CYI field workers confirm that the level of discrimination as well as the number of incidents incited by discrimination is still high, despite the aforementioned Anti-Discrimination Law.

The media still often report on street involved children as violators of public order or crime perpetrators, thus reinforcing negative stereotypes in the general public toward this population.

It is necessary to ensure that the street involved children are made visible in all relevant political discussions at the local, national and regional level.²¹

19 More on the problem of legal invisibility can be found at http://www.praxis.org.rs/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_view&gid=201

20 More about the work of organization PRAXIS <http://www.praxis.org.rs/>

21 The recommendation of the regional conference “Street involved children- our responsibility held in Belgrade, in June 2011. Conference was organized within the framework of regional Program for the fight against child trafficking in South Eastern Europe (CTRP), implemented by the *Save the Children Norway* and Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Serbia

Section II

A child in the community



Who are street involved children?

In order to ensure a comprehensive approach to protection and care for boys and girls involved in the life and work in the street, a standardized definition is required. A multitude of factors as well as the complexity of cases and problems that affect the life of socially vulnerable families cause children to fall in the category of street involved children. Therefore the abovementioned must be taken into account when harmonizing the definition in each country.

Participation of children and civil society organizations need to be ensured in the process of defining the category of street involved children.²²

One of the most commonly quoted definition in the expert community is as follows - “A street involved child is any boy or girl under 18 years of age, for whom street has become the prevalent source of income and children who are not adequately protected nor supervised by a mature adult.”²³

United Nations Fund for Children - UNICEF is an organization that developed the first definition of this target group, which is therefore presented in this Guide. The definition is set in relation to the level of involvement of children in life on the street:²⁴

- **Children on the street** - children working on the street – spend a large part of the day on the street by providing a revenue for themselves or their family members, and return at night to their families where they live, most commonly in informal settlements. It is possible that some of them attend regular school classes.
- **Children from the street** – children living on the street – are children for whom the street is not only a source of income but also a place of living. They may have and/or maintain relations with their families, but perceive streets to be their home. They are generally not included in the regular education process. It is not uncommon for a “children on the street” to become a “children from the street”.
- Children who live on the street with their family - those children who live with their families on the street.

As there is no agreement on international level on the definition of “street children”, many organizations have developed their own definitions to guide their future work, which are contingent to their own resources and cultural heritage of the community in which they implement their activities.

It is important to note that any child can get into a situation that could be characterized as the “street situation”, thus being susceptible to being characterized as a “street involved child”. Also, this situation can change at any moment.

Furthermore, it is of equal importance to be careful not to further stigmatize this category of population by the terminology itself. In working directly with children as well as with the representatives of institutions, it should be kept in mind that the messages that are being sent have affect the process of improving the position of these children.

22 The recommendation of the regional conference *Street involved children- Our responsibility*

23 The definition was created 1983 by “Inter-NGO” in Switzerland Source:
http://www.unicef.org/evaldatabase/files/ZIM_01-805.pdf

24 Source: <http://www.streetchildren.org.uk/content.asp?pageID=31#streetchild>

Having in mind the social context in Serbia, and acknowledging experience of other organizations, the CYI uses term *street involved children* and utilizes INTER NGO-s definition: "A street involved child is any boy or girl under 18 years of age, for whom the street has become the prevalent source of income and who are not adequately protected nor supervised by mature adults.

In planning and carrying out of programs the CYI also deals with children at high risk i.e. children from urban areas which, because of poverty or parental neglect, are at high risk to become street involved children.

The CYI understands *working on the street* (literally on the streets but also on other public spaces) as providing different services, collection and selling of recyclables and other objects and materials as well as begging. When speaking of begging as a model of behavior the CYI agrees with the definition presented by Milosavljevic: "begging is a social deviation and a social problem which consists of seeking the acquisition of material assets from other persons, irrevocably and without counter favors.²⁵ This definition of begging has three characteristics: demand or request that may be expressed by voice or gesture (open hand or alike), the acquisition of material value (money, food, clothing, shoes, etc.), and without any counter favors (begging is often followed by some apparent counter favors, even though the offered service is never equivalent to the given matter - for instance offering the services of augury, divination, washing windshields, etc.).

Problems which the CYI addresses and which are some of the most prominent forms of behavior among street involved children, such as *homelessness, hoboism, and begging* are given some attention among the various literature in the field of social policy and social pathology. However, children and adolescents are rarely mentioned in this context.

According to the information of the CYI, before 2004 the association "Roma Children's Centre" from Belgrade had worked with a group of children who had been living on the streets.

These children were not treated as particularly marginalized group of children, but were during the intervention by the official institutions and particularly by the social welfare system, categorized as either children who come from families with disturbed family relations or children in conflict with the law. As this inadequate categorization was the basis for planning the intervention in many cases did not yield desired results. Also, children who were caught in *vagrancy* were most frequently taken to the Shelter for children and adolescents, which at time did not have sufficient capacity to adequately take care of all children that were being brought in because of vagrancy.

Such superficial and inadequate review of the characteristics of the street involved children, as well as causes behind their being on the street and consequences of such life limited the prospect of developing adequate systemic response to address their needs and to create a successful program which would motivate children and facilitate social inclusion.

Essentially without proper parental care and adequate response from the social security system these children were more often than not left to themselves to face the challenges the life on the street brings.

Certainly, for some of the children who would be identified according to these criteria, the interventions offered by the system would be successful and would lead to termination of stay on the street. Thanks to tireless work of individuals from the centers for social work and social care as well as from the police that the CYI had the pleasure of collaboration with, some children have been involved in the education system and are placed in social welfare institutions or returned to the natural family.

25 *Devijacije i društvo*, Milosav Milosavljević, izdavačka kuća Draganić, Beograd, 2003

How many children and youth in Belgrade are *street involved children*?

The CYI has worked with over 1000 children. The number and sex of the beneficiaries varies on different location in the city. According to the World Health Organization, data shows that the age of street involved children in developed countries is over 12. The same source finds that the percentage of street involved girls in *developing countries* is below 30%, while in many developed countries with better standard of life that number is around 50% (WHO, 2000).

Figures for Serbia as country in transition, according to the CYI experience, correspond to those presented by the WHO. The first contacts and outreach work in Belgrade also confirm such findings. The first structured project that CYI implemented *The invisible girl*²⁶ revealed the problem which is persistent in many groups of children professionals in the field encounter. Girls constitute a special and vulnerable group which is due to circumstances forced to adapt to life on the streets. In the CYI experience families less often abandon girls in the adolescence age (family teaches them to be submissive and supporting), while both authorities and individuals are more prone to remove the girls from the streets. Street involved girls are most commonly involved in domestic work within a group or were victims of sexual exploitation. Sometimes they may hide their gender and position on the street. Through *The invisible girl* project we learned that some girls, when in contact with organizations and experts as well as other children and adults, use their capacities and resources to hide their gender identity, often resorting to different gender expression (e.g. tying up or hiding their breasts, cutting their hair short, dressing up as boys or even referring to themselves in male gender)²⁷. Their presence on the street is mostly visible at night, when the activity of the representatives of all relevant authorities and organizations is minimal. This is one of the reasons why they face even greater difficulties, as they are often neglected by the professionals who rarely encounter them. In our experience it is important to create favorable conditions to increase their visibility and change their marginalized position on the streets. Creating such conditions contributes to:

- Creating equal opportunities for social inclusion of street involved girls
- Empowering girls on the streets to change the traditional understanding of gender roles
- Reduction of number of minor's pregnancy and other potentially dangerous situation for the reproductive health of street involved girls

If we try to give a precise number of children in the streets the answer is at best an educated guess. It has been already mentioned that many institutions which make contacts with this population do not operate with a standardized definition. This makes estimation of the scope of this phenomena rather difficult. In most cases different organizations and institutions who provide direct service to marginalized groups and children do not account the street involved children as a separate category. Important personal or social characteristics which make these children fall into the most vulnerable category are often neglected which hinders practical approach to identifying the multitude of this category of population.

In addition, as it was already mentioned, the issue of *legal invisibility* further contributes to lack of precise data on the number of street involved children. Children who are not registered in the birth register do not possess any documents, so they can not, in legal terms, prove their existence.

²⁶ The project *An Invisible Girl* was implemented in the period of 2005-2006 with the support of the *Reconstruction-Women's Fund*. The main goal of the project was training, urgent help for street involved girls, namely teaching them to write and acquire basic and practical skills.

²⁷ In our experience in the mentioned instances the girls were not of transgender orientation but making a deliberate choice to do so with the aim of personal protection.

Moreover, these children and their families often move which makes monitoring even more difficult. Field experience tells us that many children (alone or together with their families) often move to larger settlements in search of better opportunity to earn money or better quality of life. In these constant changes of living conditions children may often lose or acquire the status of a street involved child.

Taking into account all of these factors it is very difficult to determine accurate number of street involved children.

A child which may be categorized as a street involved child today may as soon as tomorrow change its status (he or she may return to his or her family, be taken into foster care or an appropriate institution, etc.).

Until an intervention which is suited to his/her needs, age and experience is carried out it is likely that he/she will constantly be a border line case.

Discrimination on multiple grounds, poverty, as well as large number of children on the streets made this social phenomena an important issue for both expert and decision making community. At the same time, a clearer approach to defining and monitoring of this category of children was needed. In the past seven years the CYI has developed programs and services which have yielded considerable progress in achieving a higher level of social inclusion of this category of children.

What is like living on the streets for children?

Street involved children in Belgrade mostly come from marginalized communities which are stricken by extreme poverty and often come from families with dysfunctional family relations. At the moment of contact with the CYI these children are usually seriously neglected, which is the result of growing up in conditions defined by numerous unfavorable interpersonal and environmental factors.

Here are some of the main challenges and risks these children are exposed to on a daily basis:

- Economic position – in CYI experience significant majority of these children (97 %) are Roma. There has been no significant change in this respect in all these years and we believe that this clearly demonstrates the serious failure on the side of the state and its efforts to integrate members of this community which has been living on the territory of Belgrade for generations, as well as those internally displaced persons and returnees.²⁸ Poor position of the community from which majority of our beneficiaries come is undoubtedly, among other things, conditioned by high level of discrimination towards Roma which is still persisting in all spheres of the society. Poverty spanning over several generations, life in segregated informal communities without basic infrastructure (water, electricity or sewer system) as well as poor employment prospects due to educational deprivation deepen differences, cause greater social deprivation and hinder social cohesion. Inadequate employment prospects reveal serious disadvantages on the labor market as well as the effects of discrimination, thus constituting the main cause of poverty and marginalization of Roma community.²⁹ According to the survey³⁰ in which CYI participated, belonging to Roma ethnic minority is one of the main risk factors of children's begging (42%) as it is emphasized by state authorities, institutions and civil society organizations.

28 We refer to citizens of the Republic of Serbia who have lost their residence rights in some other country and have been in accordance with the Readmission agreements returned to Serbia.

29 Report *Roma and internally displaced persons in SEE*, UNDP Regional Office for Europe and Community of Independent States http://europeandcis.undp.org/uploads/public/File/rbec_web/vgr/AtRisk_Bosnian.pdf

30 Survey "Prevenција eksploatacije dece u JI Evropi - dečije prosjačenje u Srbiji", Zaštitnik građana 2011.

- Citizenship and legal subjectivity-*legal invisibility*-Alongside belonging to Roma community the most prominent feature of the street involved children is their lack of basic personal documentation- personal ID (most commonly because of lack of official residence), citizenship register. The greatest problem is when they are not recorded in the Birth certificate which makes them invisible before the law. We have already explained this issue in greater detail and demonstrated how it affects exercise of human rights. Even though access to education without documents has been secured in recent years, as well as access to basic health care, the invisibility before the law still exacerbates the risk these children are exposed to.
- Trafficking in human beings- The protection of the best interest of the child in principle is determined by the Family law, as well as in number of strategic documents, including the Strategy for fight against trafficking in human beings which includes fight against trafficking in children.³¹ However, the problem of trafficking in children has not been addressed as a specific issue and accordingly no specific measures and prevention activities are envisaged, but those which are intended for adults. Notwithstanding the fact that the Strategy determines that Labor inspectorate which is a part of the Ministry of labor and social policy has an important role in preventing trafficking in human beings, and particularly worst forms of child labor and work exploitation, in practice work exploitation is not recognized as real form of human trafficking. Due to rationalizations based on cultural patterns children do not receive adequate protection as they are not recognized as victims. In the CYI experience, boys are due to their psycho-physical status more often victims of forced labor, weather being forced to beg or perpetrate a crime, while girls are usually victims of sexual exploitation and forced marriages.
- Psychoactive substances (PS) – constitute a risk because children fear adults and other children who abuse drugs (fear from violence, theft). Furthermore, more often than not PS are used for manipulation and exploitation of children while their widespread presence and availability on the streets cause children to develop addiction to PS at a very early age which further affects their behavior. Due to early developed addiction and malnourishment the children's health is often seriously deteriorated while hectic life style and sharing of needles exposes children to risk of HIV infection and, in CYI experience, even more to Hepatitis C. Access to medical treatment is further hindered by children's distrust towards health care institutions, lack of information on the treatment itself as well as lack of required documentation. These children at the very early age start abusing glue as it is very cheap and widely available. Sometimes it is followed by mixing glue with liquid brass. In our experience, children start using marijuana, alcohol and different medicaments very shortly after first contact with glue. One of the biggest problems is the availability and low price of heroin on the streets of Belgrade so it is not uncommon that the adolescents at the age 15 show serious signs of heroin addiction.
- Traffic.- The children who are beneficiaries of the CYI program often testify that they have started spending a lot of time on the streets at a very early age. Until the age of four or five they are accompanied by an adult (mother or older sibling), while after they start begging on the crossroads and traffic lights on their own. Dozens of children reported to be involved in traffic accidents in which they are often being seriously injured. On the other hand, many of the children claim not to see any danger in working on crossroads and street lights which is a serious understatement and neglect of circumstances which puts their safety and life at risk.
- By passers and strangers.- are risk factor because of the severe discrimination towards street involved children, their health and behavior on the streets. Children are often bullied and abused by both adults and peers. That is why these children demonstrate high level of stress and fear. They develop distrust towards adults, and particularly representatives of authorities at the very early age.

31 Strategy was adopted by the Government of the Republic of Serbia in December 2006., published in the Official Gazette No. 111/2006 12th December 2006.

In order to overcome risks they are exposed to on a daily basis street involved children build up various strategies of survival.

One of the most common strategies is belonging to a group on the street. In Serbia, unlike some other countries in Europe, children form peer groups with which they either live (sleep and organize life) or work on the street (they “occupy” the same spot next to the traffic light, crossroad, often plan and perpetrate crimes together, beg either in a group or in pairs, work together on construction sites, etc.)

Belonging to a group makes them feel safe in an unsafe environment. However, it does not have only the psychological benefit but also some practical ones such as food provision, maintaining hygiene of the place they spend time in, protection from adults or other children and alike. On the other hand, belonging to a group also exposes them to other kinds of risks-clear hierarchy as well as expectations from each member are main characteristics of such groups. It is not uncommon that peers from the group organize sexual exploitation of the girls presenting it as if the girl has an obligation to earn money for the group in that way.

Street involved children see survival exclusively in terms of meeting the basic needs-food, clothing, shelter and protection from violence. The effect of a particular risk factor on a child’s life depends on his or her personal strengths and capacities in struggle for survival on the street.

Resilience is considered to be an individual trait which includes environmental and personal characteristics. It is most commonly defined as the capacity of an individual to develop positive and socially acceptable attitude and behavioral patterns regardless of the challenges he or she faces. This concept encourages professionals to focus their efforts on strengths and competencies of the children and the resources they may have in the environment. Strengths include the support network, the ability to coherently consider previous life experiences (which are mainly negative), the ability to find meaning and motivation to live (through religious or other beliefs), the acquisition of social skills which allow them to have control over the events in their lives, a positive self image, a sense of humor and alike.³²

The survey³³ in which the CYI outreach workers participated, points to the different strategies children use in their struggle for survival on the streets. Experts and field workers were often surprised by the strategies the street children devise and deploy in order to ease their own lives and reduce the risks as well as with the consequences of their exposure to the various risk factors. The beginning of the outreach work for the CYI employees was marked by learning about new choices a particular child has made and the specific ways in which he/she deals with the problems he or she encounters.

The most common strategy is **avoiding dangerous places and people**: “I avoid aggressive people, drunks, and junkies. Maybe because I used to be one and I am not any more, I know how to behave myself now. I have been avoiding Vozdovac since the last time I fled from the shelter. If I were to show up there, there would be threats and all sorts of things coming from some people.”³⁴ **Moving and working in groups** makes life easier and offers protection particularly to younger children. A group facilitates problem solving, provides leadership and a space for learning skills necessary for survival on the streets. Younger children often work or spend time on the streets with older brothers, cousins or know young men who are held in high regard on the streets. This strategy of protection increases their sense of security. **Maintaining good relations with the neighborhood** is a form of social capital. Children ask for help adults working in the immediate surroundings, such as salespersons in local shops, taxi drivers, security personnel of the embassies: “Cups did not harass me there, I had a lot of taxi drivers for friends, they defended me, and everything.”³⁵

32 Ruttler, 1999., Werner and Smith, 1992.

33 Children speak out - the risk of human trafficking and resilience of children in South East Europe, Nevenka Zegarac, Save the Children UK, Belgrade, 2007

34 Interview in the squat, Sanja, August 2006, Children speak out - the risk of human trafficking and resilience of children in South East Europe, Nevenka Zegarac, Save the Children UK, Belgrade, 2007

35 Interview on the street, Bokca, November 2006, Children speak out - the risk of human trafficking and resilience of children in South East Europe, Nevenka Zegarac, Save the Children UK, Belgrade, 2007

Section III

Developing a community for children



Developing a community for children

An organization or an institution reflects accepted or desired norms in carrying out its activities, i.e. the norms in which citizens of that community believe in. The law must be respected; however there are many shortcomings in its implementation. Thus, a prospect for different members of the community to solve problems in their own way is created.

The values that stand behind our work are a reflection of democratic principles and other values our country is striving for. Regrettably, the things written on paper are not matched by the reality. It is the lack of respect for standards related to working with street involved children and imminent consequences that prompts the CYI to insist on a different approach.

The development of new theories, application of the principles of work with marginalized groups which are accepted on the level of EU, financial investments in the area of child protection (even though still insufficient), as well as knowledge and persistence of students who built this institution have contributed to development of the child protection program which insists on a unique process of protection marked by participation of children, families and all other relevant social actors.

The CYI adheres to principles of the Convention on the rights of the child and, decades after its adoption, emphasizes some of the inadequately applied postulates and adapts it to time and community in which it operates and most importantly to the needs of the children it works with.

The four fundamental principles of the Convention (non-discrimination, dedication to the best interest of the child, right to life, sustenance and development, and taking into account the views of the child) are the everlasting source of possible models for providing support to children.

After the specific problem a particular target group suffers from is detected, and specificities of the group and risk factors are understood and before any activities or interventions are planned, the answer to the question what do we want to accomplish with the action needs to be found. Namely, **what is the objective of the activity/program?** This question needs to be properly addressed when new outreach officers are introduced to the program.

Also it is important to determine **In what manner do we operate?** It is important to define values and establish an ethical code of the organization prior to development of the program itself. Such a code guides and aids attempts to provide support and empower the street involved children.

Guiding principles for working with street involved children

Having in mind that there is no universally accepted theoretical approach to defining a system of values, nor is there an universal ethical code, the purpose of this chapter is to serve as an entry point and a helping hand for service providers so that their intervention may be **purposeful and their programs accessible to children** they work with.

The main goal of the outreach work is improving access to services a particular target group is in need of.

Each and every undertaken activity, as well as the omitted ones, reflects values behind it. Neither children nor people who work with them are immune to prejudices which are prevalent in the community they live in.

It is important to realize that a child's behavior reflects his or her adopted set of beliefs and attitudes. Moreover, it is important to keep in mind that even though that a certain set of values guides one's actions, that set of values may be changed. That is the niche in which an outreach worker needs to meet the child it works with. Even though this is a long process it is the way in which we fight stigmatization and prejudices that street involved children are exposed to. The first step for opening prospects of such change is building a relationship of trust between an outreach worker and a child.

- The principle of **being nonjudgmental towards children** is the corner stone of the relationship of trust. For example, if a child abuses drugs it should not be labeled as a junkie. The conversation should be directed so as to understand the reasons behind substance abuse. Children should be supported to resolve issues in a more constructive way. At the same time we should work with the child, informing and education her/him on the harmful effects of substance abuse. The child should be encouraged to quit or enter a rehabilitation program. The most important step in the process of (re)integration of street involved children is to create space for individual growth and development of each boy and girl within the framework of the program. In this process special attention should be given to recognizing individual competencies and skills of a particular child rather than focusing on weaknesses and problems which are, obviously, not to be neglected.
- By opening the Drop in center for street involved children the CYI had a chance to present to the public approach which incorporates the principle of free will. This constitutes the second most important principle of work with street involved children-the **principle of consent**. This principle does not entail unlimited freedom of choice in an unlimited timeframe or creation of space which is completely free from rules and conditions. Professionals working in the CYI acknowledge that these children need structured space as such space provides a sense of security. However, all of the CYI programs follow the principle of consent, as it recognizes it as a critical phase even though it is just a temporary solution. Through the CYI programs children are included into the wider community. Any other approach would be treated as restrictive by the beneficiaries.

It is also important to note that the principles the CYI determined are fitted to the characteristics of the target group. A child is given clear boundaries within the program. However, those boundaries may differ from the wishes of a particular child so it is important to provide support to a child so he/she may become aware of his/her needs. At the same time, training of the outreach workers entails empowerment to become aware of their own as well as of the children's needs and emotions as well as acquisition of skills necessary to provide support and encourage children to freely articulate their needs. It is important to keep in mind that even though the process of integration of this highly discriminated group is overflowed with difficulties each and every child (as well as an adult) needs to feel protected and safe.

In the CYI experience, the debate which is still ongoing among the general public and the expert community entails two greatest fallacies pertaining to the capacities of a child.

The first one is that children *are not capable of, and accordingly should not make their own decisions*. The other one is that a child is never mature enough to participate in making the decisions which affect them.

Even though there is an attitude that it is important to include children and their views when working with them questions why and how that should be done still remain.

The appropriate position is to maintain that each child should participate when being assessed or admitted to a program and that it should be consulted in the process of the planning of such activities.

Because of the specific life experiences the street involved children have it is even more important to ensure their participation.

Experiences from the field provide a number of arguments in favor of increase of the level of children's participation. Hodgson states that research on intellectual, emotional and social development of children suggests that children from the earliest age can make a contribution on the matter of their wishes and on how they wish to be treated. Strong argument in favor of participation of children and youth in decision making (Hodgson, 1983) is that participation in effect means allowing someone to regain a certain level of control over his/her life, thus providing him/her with the sense of worthiness and acceptance. Participation strengthens self esteem, self respect and self-reliance, which is one of the goals of any program- that a person is independent and self-reliant and is not depending on the services provided by the community or other people. Participative approach in work with people is definitely not new but is often inadequately understood or poorly applied in practice.

How to plan a response to needs and problems street involved children face?

Before beginning to work with children and planning future services and interventions it is important to evaluate the existing resources in the community as well as to carefully consider the needs of the target group.

Outreach workers of the CYI at the beginning of their activities assessed needs of the street involved children. This was the entry point for designing of the CYI programs. The specific programs were designed according to the different backgrounds children have as well as different resources the communities from which they came possessed. Our positive experience in working in such manner is a recommendation for others to investigate the field as well. Source of information may be both primary and secondary. CYI outreach workers have used both.

At the first place it was important to examine economic, social and political conditions in the community. Besides this, the analysis of attitudes of the general population towards the target group as well as evaluation of existing services and potential obstacles were the basic steps after which we could design the two most important programs (Outreach program and Drop in center for children program). These two programs have grown over time to become the local community service.

Gathering data and information is an important part of the process and should receive due diligence. Namely, many street involved children refuse to talk about their life, particularly with strangers. Experience has thought them to be very careful to whom, when and what kind of information they reveal. It is not uncommon for these children, especially during the first few encounters, to be very suspicious towards adults and outreach workers. It is important to be careful about what kind of questions and in which manner they are asked, so that the children do not get scared of the *curiosity of the strangers*. In a word, each and every first contact should be carefully planned and thought through.

In our experience, particular attention should be paid to the **first contact**. It is of crucial importance as well as starting up a conversation with a child, so we recommend to our outreach workers to carefully plan it and analyze the location where it takes place (how much light is there, is there heavy traffic, is it close to some of the institutions, are there other adults, etc.). If a child is coming to the premises or joining the program intended for them for the first time it is important to prepare personnel to meet him or her. The goal of these preparations is not to make the child **feel threatened**. A common characteristic of the children the CYI has worked with in the past years is that it is very difficult for them to speak about painful experiences and their life and they usually have hard time explaining their emotions. In such cases, questions should be formulated in a very general way at the beginning so that a child has enough time to get to know the person talking to them as well as to understand the intentions of that person. Specific questions should follow afterwards.

Due to exposure to multiple risks street involved children are in need of different resources to meet their needs. It may be said that there are internal resources (features of an individual) and external resources (environmental ones) available.

There are several levels of intervention intended to cater for children's needs.

First, action can be taken on an individual level which entails identifying of the children at risk, and working on enhancing their basic skills to lead their life and use institutions which have competencies to help them address their problems.

The second level is work in the local community which entails service provision as well as improving access to other services and programs.

The third level entails work outside of the local community, i.e. advocacy for improving policies, access to health care, initiating changes of the existing legislation and alike. These activities may be of local, national or international character and directly affect the activities on the second level, i.e. service providing in local community.

There isn't a simple approach to design a quality mechanism for improving life conditions of the street involved children and decreasing the number of the children on the streets.

As concluded earlier, a number of factors influence life of the street involved children which makes identifying problems and their causes difficult.

After years of experience, which correspond to some experiences in other countries, the CYI has managed to recognize some of the ways in which the issue may be addressed. In the text which follows universal recommendations of the World health organization's (2000) for improving the child's health, support and prevention are laid out and those relevant to street involved children health are underlined.

- *Safe and supporting environment*

The term environment is used to refer to all the factors in a child's life which are independent of children themselves. It includes legal, economic, social and cultural context, including education and other opportunities to acquire skills and build positive relations with other people. Within this approach, environment causes specific behavioral choices. The main goal is to create safe and supporting environment and ensure conditions for further growth and development of the child.

- *Relevant information*

Information is the basis on which decisions are made and future life planned. Street involved children often lack information, and it is not unusual for them to be misinformed about number of things. Thus, in communication with them it is sometimes necessary to start at the beginning, e.g. it may be necessary to explain what is skin?³⁶ After that it is important to provide information on the following topics, in accordance with his/her age and previous knowledge and experience: sexual and reproductive health, harmful effects of drug (ab)use, prevention measures from number of diseases (e.g. oral hygiene), promotion of healthy life styles (exercise, diet) and other topics such as human rights and the laws in force.³⁷ Information should be given in accordance with the age and adapted to vocabulary of the child.

36 This example is taken from a nurse report on her work with a 14 year old child who is beneficiary of the Drop in center.

37 Street involved children are often in conflict with the law, so it is important to inform them of socially unacceptable and sanctioned behavior, as well as on the potential consequences of a particular behavior, so that they can make informed choices.

- *Capacity building and acquisition of specific skills*

It is very possible that life of a street involved child is filled with dangers, pressures and stress. In order to deal with such circumstances or to become part of the street culture children often resort to drug abuse and other forms of risky behavior. Hence, it is important for them to develop healthier and more constructive ***coping strategies***.³⁸ Capacity building is a process of guided learning of a set of structural activities. The intention is to equip a child with new and enhanced strategies for handling every day problems on the streets as well as specific situations they may encounter. Many skills may be useful for a child in planning and carrying out responsible and healthy choices. It entails acquisition of life skills and other different practical traits they have interest in.

- *Support and counseling*

Counseling is the process of interpersonal communication in which a particular person who has a certain problem or unfulfilled need is helped to better understand the circumstances in which he or she is in with the aim to help him or her to adequately respond. Counseling is important for street involved children particularly in the crisis situation such as violence or some form of exploitation (sexual, work...) and it is a first step after providing security and attending to possible health needs. The most important skill in the process of counseling is empathy. It entails active listening, understanding and feedback. Empathy includes respect for the child and demonstrates trust in a child's ability to find his/her own solution. Approach must be positive, honest, adopted to the child's needs and culturally sensitive.

- *Enabling access to health care*

Health care institutions provide general health care, urgent care, and preventive care and promote their services. These services may play an important role in disease prevention and promotion of healthy life styles as well as in the process of identifying potentially elevated risk exposure. Also, health care services may help in detecting, treating and rehabilitation of street involved children. Health problems which the street involved children suffer from are similar to those of children of the general population. However their problems are usually greater due to poor access to health care which often exacerbates the situation. The reasons why children do not receive care can be emotional in nature (fear of doctors)³⁹, poor access to health facilities (there is no doctor in the neighborhood⁴⁰, it is too expensive, lack of needed documents), the health care workers attitude (being judgmental⁴¹, disrespectful, neglectful) and the attitude of the children themselves (low self esteem, resignation, attempts to take care of their medical needs themselves⁴²).

38 Coping strategy- a conscious effort to resolve personal or interpersonal problem, attempt to take control of, minimize or tolerate stress or conflict.

39 In CYI outreach workers' experience children often have irrational fear of medical treatment – "it will hurt a lot", "what if my arm or my tooth falls off", "I will die", etc.

40 Their settlements or shelters are often situated on the periphery of the city where there is no medical center.

41 Children often report that they are often being insulted, disrespected or judged by health workers who are often disrespecting health and life habits of their community (majority of the street involved children are Roma)

42 Outreach workers are often witness of various ways in which street involved children attempt to deal with their medical problems including magic, binding wounds in incorrect way or taking inappropriate prescription drugs.

About association Center for Youth Integration

“Center for Youth Integration is an organization which initiates, carries out and supports responsible societal changes which are aimed at integration of children and youth. It devotes its resources, acting alone or in partnership with others, to protection of the rights of the child; acts in a manner which is in the best interest of children and youth; implements programs and continually improves quality of service with the aim to incite society to behave responsibly towards its each member.”⁴³

CYI was founded in 2004 by a group of students from the Faculty for special education and rehabilitation of the University of Belgrade.⁴⁴ Majority of the founding members were students of the Department for prevention and treatment of behavioral disorders. In the first year of its work the CYI included students from the Faculty of Political Science of the University of Belgrade.

The association was established with the aim to provide a volunteer based educational and creative workshops to children without family care who were placed in the institutions on the territory of Belgrade. The workshop program named STAIRWAYS which was implemented by the CYI from 2004-2007 included over 400 student volunteers. Students were divided in teams and had carried out activities on a daily basis providing structured time for the children placed under institutional care, thus aiding institutions while at the same time gaining precious experience in direct work with children and youngsters.

One year after its establishment, while working with the STAIRWAY program, several volunteers raised the issue of the children spending time on the crossroads on a daily basis. Not long after that the CYI formed the team which after work ours of the organization started going out on the street in order to gather more information on reasons behind the children being on the street as well as about the needs they might have.

First two years of the outreach

The initial idea students had was to get to know the children on the street and direct them towards the institutions which had competencies to resolve the situation in which they were.

What we call today the “Outreach Program”, in 2005 was a “spontaneous social activity”.⁴⁵ At the time, the CYI did not have the resources to cater to the basic needs of the children on the street (provision of food and facilities for personal hygiene). Students were preparing meals at home and distributing them to the children together with mainly their own cloths. They were also notifying the centers for social work on the situation these children were in.

News that “some students”, as the children called them, were out on the streets because of them was spreading quickly. During the first two years of its activities the CYI activities mainly consisted of getting insight into the causes of children being on the streets, visiting the places those children slept in and worked at and building possible support network in local community.

Meeting new children and gaining better insight into the situation in which they lived was the first step in the more structured effort to develop the Outreach program. By the end of 2005 the CYI raised first

⁴³ Mission of the CYI

⁴⁴ Faculty for special education and rehabilitation, hereinafter FSER

⁴⁵ *Teorija socijalnog rada*, Milan Petričković, Socijalna misao, 2006.

funds which were intended to provide support to the street involved girls.⁴⁶ What could be described as spontaneous social activities in the beginning of 2005 at the end of that year was a regular, organized activity of the CYI.

Graduated social workers and pedagogues, divided in outreach teams, according to roster and with clear objectives had been visiting specific locations. At the same time, a number of the requests girls, but also boys had (clothing, health care, mediation in communication with their families and centers for social care, reporting harassment...) challenged CYI to even better organize its activities. In October 2006 a new group of students from the FSER joined the organization which allowed increased presence on the streets. The first education of the new outreach workers was carried out and the first Rulebook on Outreach Work was designed (this Rulebook has been modified four times since then so as to better suit its purpose). In the same year the CYI has introduced on call duty using cell phone which is still available 24 hours a day for street involved children.

The Drop in center since 2007

As it was previously mentioned, during the first year of its work the CYI outreach workers were gaining better insight into the factors that lead children out on the street. There were no other professionals in the local community which could at that time provide better information on the phenomena of street involved children. Thus, the CYI developed a belief that the children themselves actually knew best what they needed. Apart from this, in developing the Outreach Program it was of importance that the coordination team of the CYI had an opportunity to visit organization which offer child protection services in England, USA, Canada and Africa. Efforts to build a support system started giving results in 2007 when several experts in the field of social protection and social policy become the CYI associates in building support system for street involved children.

After two years of intensive outreach work designed in accordance with the principle of the children's participation and the principle of trust the CYI had a much clearer picture on how to further develop the support system for street involved children.

The idea to establish the Drop in center was in the first place the idea of the children themselves who when asked What do you need the most? answered: A washing machine, so that I can wash my T-shirt.⁴⁷

The first Drop in center for children was opened in 2007 in Belgrade. The financial support for the Drop in center was provided by the Fund for Social Innovation⁴⁸ and Save the Children UK, while the formal partner was the City center for social work in Belgrade. The program's facilities were in an apartment in a small residential building and were designed on the principle of harm reduction.⁴⁹

From our previous experience we knew street involved children lived or worked in groups, but also that some adults were often present in those groups. In order to ensure that the work with the children is being carried out without any disturbances, the CYI widened the scope of its activities to include young adults

⁴⁶ The project *An Invisible Girl* was implemented in the period of 2005-2006 with the support of the *Reconstruction-Women's Fund*.

⁴⁷ This response was recorded by the outreach workers who worked with children in squatted house on the Slavija square in Belgrade.

⁴⁸ <http://www.sif.minrzs.gov.rs/>

⁴⁹ For more on harm reduction see: <http://www.harmreduction.org/section.php?id=62> Note: even though harm reduction principle and programs mainly deal with the problem of substance abuse, CYI interpreted harm reduction as response to consequences of living on the street.

up to 26 years of age. The reason behind this decision was that it was easier to come into contact with the younger children in the group if the relationship of trust was established with these more senior members.

Even though this orientation towards adults diminished capacities to work with children which are particularly vulnerable due to meager biological strength in comparison to adults as well as because of prevalent social norms (children are expected to obey adults, conform his/her behavior to their expectations, greater exposure to risk from manipulation and exploitation), we had positive experiences with work in such mixed age groups. These positive experiences were the reason we decided to keep the Drop in center open for children and youth up to 26 years of age.

The overall goal of the project was to contribute to improvement of the access to rights of the street involved children who request or consent to service which is offered. This was to be achieved through temporal or occasional offering of urgent intervention and by meeting immediate needs of the target population. Furthermore, it entailed ensuring access to other services, rights and measures offered by the system of health care, social protection and other relevant systems. It also included mediation and continuous support to children enrolling and attending school classes. The broader objective consisted of implementation of activities aimed at reducing risks the street involved children were exposed to and increase in the level of social inclusion. Such an objective entailed several specific objectives: providing support on the ground (addressing the issue in the environment it spurs in); providing facilities for personal hygiene, regular and healthy meals, adequate clothing and safe place (at least temporarily); ensuring access to health care; providing programs aimed at capacity building of their social and life skills; prevention of further escalation of the crisis; building trust, self esteem, self discipline and respect for authority (deconstructing notions of authority based on extortion and violence); encouraging children to develop attitudes which would improve their ability to enhance their self care and empowering them to support other especially vulnerable children/minors.

The plan was to implement activities over the nine months period, both in the premises and in the field, aimed at providing help and support to 100 beneficiaries. However, the news that there is a place where street involved children may come and use the aforementioned services quickly resonated in the community. After only four weeks of operations, the Drop in center had evidenced 70 beneficiaries. Despite the CYI efforts to inform the neighborhood about the population and the problems they face, inhabitants of one of the oldest municipalities in Belgrade did not want the children from the Drop in center in their vicinity. After numerous reports to city authorities and police as well as verbal conflicts the Drop in center was forced to cease its operations in December 2007.

In the following two weeks, the CYI focused its efforts on continuing to provide support which was available in the Drop in center in a modified form through Outreach work. Moreover, a campaign was launched with the aim to mobilize the public to get involved in finding a solution for the Drop in center. Thanks to quick reaction of several public figures, the next few months the Drop in center operated in the premises of the Cultural Centre REX⁵⁰.

Thanks to this event, the CYI has directed its further efforts towards breaking the negative stereotypes by strengthening its media relations and mobilizing the public in order to create a more favorable conditions for lobbying for the sustainability of the project. Moreover, these events contributed to forging of the long term partnership between CYI and different organizations as well as local authorities. The CYI has been particularly supported by the TV station B92⁵¹ but also by other broadcast and print media.

After the space for public discussion about the problems the Drop in center faced was created, the Government of the City of Belgrade, namely City Secretariat for children's and social protection has

50 Cultural Center Rex is a center for contemporary arts and engaged cultural practices. The common goal of REX projects is to encourage and empower individuals and groups to express and realize their ideas and to develop understanding of social relations which would allow them to use their knowledge and skills in a creative way. <http://www.rex.b92.net/sr.html>

51 http://www.b92.net/o_nama/index.php

provided premises for the Drop in center in the Municipality of Zvezdara on May 9th 2008. The Drop in center was reopened and started providing services on the new location on the May 24th 2008.

The Drop in center, which operated 24 hours a day, seven days until the end of 2011 provided services for 653 minors. The Drop in center welcomes daily around 30 most vulnerable kids, while this number during the winter times climbs as high as 70. Boys compose majority of 70%, while majority of the children are between 10 and 14 years old.

There are three Drop in centers in Serbia today- in Belgrade, Nis and Novi Sad and one day care center for street involved children in Belgrade on the territory of the Municipality of New Belgrade.

Standardization of experiences

With the support of Save the Children Norway and UNICEF Serbia, the CYI has initiated and lead the process of development of the *Minimum standards for outreach work with children at risk*.

The general definition explains standards in terms of “documented agreements which contain technical and other specifications or other precise criteria which are consistently used as rules, guidelines and definitions with the aim to ensure purposefulness of products, processes or services” (ISO 9000).

It was important to include into this process as many individuals, institutions and organizations from different sectors as well as the beneficiaries of the services themselves. When it comes to developing standards in the field of social protection they should be developed in accordance with the existing policies, legal framework, good practices and available research.

Minimum standards define the base line quality of service which needs to be provided as well as the minimum threshold. They should be:

- Applicable to wide array of services
- Be in function of regulating the work of the social protection services
- Allow for the self-evaluation of the professionals involved
- Serve as the basis for training of the professionals
- Provide orientation for the beneficiaries on what they can expect from the services.⁵²

In the process of development of the Minimum standards participation of the representatives of state institutions and civil society organizations from Novi Sad Nis and Belgrade was ensured. The process had lasted for eleven months and consisted of several phases:

- Selection and invitation of the participants;
- Review of the relevant documentation;
- Selection of an neutral facilitator experienced in guiding similar processes and knowledgeable in the field of social protection and existing practices and processes;
- Scheduling and organization of working meetings;
- Delegating responsibilities in the function of efficiency;
- Drafting the document;
- Receiving comments (electronic mail)-an efficient sharing of comments and suggestions;
- Follow-up meetings with key stakeholders in the process and the representatives of UNICEF and

52 *Razvoj lokalnih usluga socijalne zaštite ka standardima kvaliteta*, Nevenka Žegarac, Miroslav Brkić, Program Ujedinjenih nacija za razvoj (UNDP) Beograd, 2007.

Save the Children Norway with the aim of final alterations and amendments;

- Finalizing the document;
- Submitting the document to the Working group within the Ministry of Social work and social policy
- Lobbying for the document to be adopted;

The following excerpts are from the document “**Minimum standards for outreach work with children at risk**”:

Purpose of the service – Outreach service for children is a set of continuous activities based on consent and participation of the beneficiary, in accordance with the best interest of the child and in function of identifying, i.e. gaining insight into needs, strengths, difficulties and risks in relation to the child, with the aim to cater to the child’s needs which are not catered for by other services, improvement of access of other services for the child, as well as reducing risk the child is exposed to – direct outreach to children beneficiaries by visiting locations where and at times when the child may be found. Outreach service entails response to critical situations in which a child may be with the aim of harm control and reduction. By the outreach service the responsibility is divided between the social and health care protection institutions, other social actors (service providers) and the beneficiary child herself/himself. In this way a child is provided with support, his/her self-esteem is being built, practical skills developed and the child is empowered to participate in the process of behavioral change meant to protect and build his/her capacities.

Priority groups – Children of sexes, members of vulnerable groups (marginalized children), age 7-18, i.e. the children who:

- Live or work on the street
- Come from extremely poor conditions
- Without regulated legal identity
- Not included into the education system
- Discriminated on any grounds (nationality, health status, sexual orientation, etc.)
- Victims of exploitation and maltreatment
- Children on the move (including voluntary and forced migration)
- Children victims of trafficking in human beings
- Neglected or in risk of being neglected
- in conflict with the law
- with behavioral problems – violent behavior
- users of psychoactive substances
- returnees (in the process of readmission)⁵³

Specification of the service/Main groups of activities – Activities should be implemented so as to allow for the participation of the child as well as the person responsible for the child, with the aim of providing support i.e. access to service which is in the best interest of the child. The priority in these activities should be reduction of the risks the child is exposed to, informal education and prevention of both the child and the immediate environment.

The Minimum standards for work with children at risk are still in the process of adoption by the Working group formed by the Ministry of labor and social policy. It is important that they were agreed upon between the organizations which participated in the process and that they are implemented in practice.

53 Note: priority groups are not listed in the order of priority

Section IV

On the ground



On the ground

People walk by street involved children every day. These children work next to traffic lights...sit in the parks...talk to each other. They struggle to feed themselves. While you are reading this some of them are probably going to a nearby parking lot where two of their friends are already waiting. They are checking if someone had forgotten to lock the car. Rain starts to fall...They search for a place to take cover before they are completely wet. The one they have found is not to their liking. They try to sit tight next to each other believing it will keep them warm...they wait for a day to end and tomorrow to come. They do not like the dark or being cold but they do not have anything else. That is what they live for and nothing else. They stand up again, with difficulty, they have to move on.

*"What should I do today? Should I go with my father to collect paper or should I stay here and get some more sleep? I'll hang out with my homies. It's definitely going to be nicer there. We'll meet downtown, there is a lot of people there, and there is money where the people are. We met. Look, there is Jelena, i can't believe it. Oh man. I had money yesterday...stupid...if knew I would have bought some grease. What should I do now? I feel disgusting. I know, let me go steal something and get right back. So what, I'll do anything for love, what, you wouldn't steal. She is working the streets, I know, but man, I like her. All day about Jelena. She is high; don't need this god knows who has she been with...dude, look at those eyes. I would marry her if I only had money. Here he comes, he has brought it. We smoke, far out, I'll blow my mid out and than we will laugh. She may notice me. I am standing next to her and I just kicked Marko to let her now I am no chicken. Where to? She has left. Never mind, here is Marko. I haven't eaten anything, but he had brought some glue. I'll forget about food and about her. Wow...where are we? I have no idea but I am feelin' good. My stomach aches. I have to eat somethin'. I'll die. I went to my family. Not again, old man asked me if I had worked today. He never asks me if I have gone to school, just wants to know if I have brought some money. I didn't bring any money, you may.... I am out of here, rain beats being beaten."*⁵⁴

We have already said that life on the street is a vicious circle.

The most common story of ending up on the street goes as follows. A child start running away from home, shelters, families, doctors or social workers because something is not to his/her liking. They describe this in number of various ways, while the common reason is that their needs in those relations or institutions were not recognized nor respected. They feel that they do not belong there. Sometimes, when they have no other place to go, most usually during the winter they go back to their family thinking: I hope I am not going to be beaten again. In this process they meet someone older. They become part of a group very quickly. They find support in such a group and think it to be at least a temporary replacement family. In most cases the oldest in the group exploits the other. The children start to work on the street for someone else. They can hardly see the way out by themselves and sometimes accepting such forms of behavior is the only way to adapt and survive. Low self-esteem, sense of being abandoned and helplessness, as well as fear from the future life set the ground for a child to start harming his/herself. Many kids our outreach workers encountered had numerous scars from self-inflicted injuries.

There is always something happening in the group: someone earned some money, someone run away, something is going to happen, some love affair is beginning to happen-all this is very interesting and at the beginning very appealing to them. The younger they are the more vulnerable and susceptible to various forms of exploitation they are. Even though the life on the streets seems completely disorganized it is not really so. The CYI outreach workers could often detect a system of hierarchy within a particular group.

⁵⁴ This story was written to illustrate a day on the streets. It is based on seven year experience of working with street involved children.

There are clear rules. These rules may vary from group to group, but it is safe to say that the strongest member and the one with the most experience with the contacts with police is the leader.

Outreach workers and the CYI are often asked: *Why do these children remain on the streets, why do they refuse to leave even when they have a chance to?* Choosing to give up being on the street entails facing many fears these children have. It requires certain skills to live in conditions which most people find normal. These children know that the language is different; they think they do not have what it takes to make it. For them, as cruel as it may be the street is a familiar environment, they have accepted the rules of the street life and have built mechanisms to make their way.

What is outreach?

The term outreach is often explained in different ways. Organizations and institutions which practice this method or provide such service often explain it in its own terms. There isn't a single term nor proper translation and often different synonyms are used such as, "street social work", "field work", "mobile teams", "work on the streets" while some organizations simply do not translate the word but use the term outreach. Most commonly this term refers to work which is carried out in the community, on the ground, on the street with the population which abuses substances or are at risk of HIV infection and other STDs. However, it is more appropriate to say that outreach is the manner in which marginalized groups are contacted and worked with. Under marginalized groups we mean any group of people which is in some way excluded from the mainstream society including street involved children, drug users, youngsters in conflict with the law, commercial sex workers, men who have sex with men (MSM)⁵⁵, homeless people, hobos, older people, etc.

The outreach practice has been known for a long time. There are records of outreach type of work right after the Second World War. Because of its devastating effect a number of children and youth had lost their families and tried to make their way on the street. Also, because of the huge numbers of persons with handicap, scarcity of resources and endangered mental health the first forms of support for children and families emerged.

Outreach work is, first of all, an attitude and an approach. Depending on the community it was intended for and resources which are available in the community it may be presented either as a method of work (program) or as a service targeting specific population.

It is important for outreach workers to be aware of their own principles and beliefs as well as those of the organization they work for. Outreach should be carried out with full respect of each and every street involved child so as to reach as many children as possible and establish with them a quality relationship of trust enabling further work on building capacities of the child and on changing the condition he or she lives in.

No one is on the street by accident. No one is on the margins of the society by accident. Street involved children are often in conflict with the norms of the society which are considered to constitute normal and acceptable behavior. The discrepancy between the expectations of the community on how a child should behave and the understanding of why a particular child behaves in such a way often puts outreach workers and organization in an uncomfortable position in which this discrepancy must be overcome.

⁵⁵ Translation from English

Basic terms and definition of the outreach

The meaning of the term outreach is reaching someone, catching up with someone who is outside. Here it is inferred that someone who is outside of the institutional frame needs to be reached. i.e. someone who is on the margins of the society.

The CYI outreach workers go to places where the children work, live and gather. Traditional approach in which clients are coming to the institution is slowly disappearing from practice because the outreach work may be organized in different environments and different locations which increases both efficiency and quality of intervention.

How exactly the outreach work is going to be defined also depends on the specificities of the group it is meant to address. Rhodes defines outreach as community based activity with the general aim of easing health care and reducing the risk of HIV transmission between individuals and groups who are not effectively reached with the existing services and through traditional educational contacts (Rhodes, 1991).

- Work methods deployed within outreach may be based on various models of contacting population and of intervention itself. There are three most important methods: Separate work-the one which takes place in the institutions, prisons, police stations, hospitals, rehabilitation centers, etc. Outreach workers visit other institutions where the beneficiaries are located and conduct their activities there.
- The outreach on a designated location: as part of a project or a particular institution an outreach team is provided with designated places where they are stationed and await the beneficiaries to come. Such places may be a van on the street, a designated space particularly equipped to suit the purpose, somewhere in the vicinity of the place where target population reside.
- The street outreach work, which can further be categorized:
 - Drop off is the simplest and the least demanding form of outreach, where workers walk through the location where a particular group resides and hand out educative material, health packages, food and alike. The visits are brief and are repeated after a period it is deemed to be necessary.
 - Active outreach work is a planned and long term action which does not end with one encounter and contact. The outreach worker identifies location in which he/she will conduct its activities and identifies the specific target group; he/she establishes longer and quality communication with beneficiaries. In the text that follows we will use the term outreach to designate this form of work.⁵⁶

The overall goal of the outreach work with street involved children is designing new or securing access to existing services they need, most commonly social and health related programs and services.

Outreach program should also include preventive measures. It should combine different measures and programs which are based on the harm reduction principle. Since the existing services and programs rarely reach the street involved children, and even when they do they are often not suited to their needs, the role of outreach work gains in importance in the process of social inclusion.

⁵⁶ Vodič za Outreach rad - kako približiti HIV prevenciju vulnerabilnim osobama, Viktorija Cucić, 2009

Work with the street involved children should be designed on several levels: on the level of individual child and the desired change in his/her life, on the level of local community and on the level which surpasses local community and entails efforts to make systemic changes.

For all these reasons, the organization which designs its outreach program has enough room to define specific goals of its work with street involved children. In our experience these goals may include:

- Ensuring access to needed services and programs in the communities
- Providing support to building of constructive relations with family members, peers and/or institutions
- Making contact with children with the aim of knowledge and skill transfer related to a specific topic or an issue.
- Implementing interventions aimed at prevention and risk reduction (to which children are exposed acutely or chronically)
- Providing information on topics which are relevant for them
- Specific changes in the legislation, rulebooks, protocols and other written norms
- Raising awareness among general public on the problems these children face on a daily basis.

The child-outreach worker relationship (trust building)

The relationship forged between an outreach worker and a street involved child is, in our experience on the ground, very important and it is the first step towards achieving the desired results. Outreach workers should strive to treat each and every child with respect as human being which can take control over his/her life in accordance with his/her age. This is the main and sometimes the most difficult task to be fulfilled by outreach workers. Sometimes it may even take as much as half a year up to a year to establish the relationship of trust with a child, which clearly demonstrates how difficult this task may be. Unfortunately, if the outreach work is not being carried out according to the agreed principle, and if the communication within the team is not constructive and open mistakes can be made which may result in the breaking of the established relationship of trust. For the same reason it is important to pay attention to communication within a team, with the child and the community, as well as to relations with the child, information he/she is provided with, promises which are given and interventions and activities which are suggested to them.

Street involved children will allow outreach workers into their life only if they recognize their good intentions, their wish to spend quality time with them i.e. if they recognize a genuine interest of the outreach worker for their lives. Outreach workers would always keep this in mind when in contact with street involved children.

These children often use specific language and jargon which needs to be understood. Particular attention should be paid to what kind of language and terminology is used, especially during the first several contacts, so that a child can understand messages and start to trust an outreach worker.

Relationship of trust is a two-way process. Outreach worker should also demonstrate trust in children's capacities.

Understanding environment in which these children are (location where they work, their favorite hanging out places, other children they spend time with, locations where they sleep, etc.) should allow access and establishment of the relationship of trust. An important feature of the outreach work is spending time on

the streets with these children. It entails frequent and lengthy visits to the locations, conversations as well as doing things they do (playing soccer, listening to music, talking about things that matter to them). It is important to make these children believe they can trust the outreach worker so that they would be the first in chain of people children would call in case they need help or support. Establishing such relationship is a conscious process and it is not supposed to be incidental in nature. The relationship should be free from dishonesty, recklessness and superficiality. It is important for outreach workers to understand that the relationship they are trying to build may be the first one with an adult a child is giving a chance to after painful experiences he/she may have had.

The importance of the first contact should be particularly underlined. Sometimes it is an impassable factor in a child's life. They often speak of the first impressions and the relationships they established based on the first contact. This should be clear to each and every outreach worker. Possible approaches may include planning of individual encounters and approaching children on the location they are in.

Gathering information from the surrounding area and other peers could also be a way to reduce negative consequences of a maladroit first contact.

Children's sense of accessibility of the outreach workers is conditioned by the established relationship and on the availability of the outreach worker to offer help and support when the children need them. Accessibility can also be further developed in various ways.

The CYI outreach workers have had the same phone number for six years, which is always on and which children may call either to report a problem or just to talk to someone in hard times. During one phase of the project, when the coordination team has realized that children may forget who and how they can ask for help, special wristbands, with number were handed out to them, so that they may have them at all times.

Characteristics and responsibilities of the outreach worker

An outreach worker, when working with street involved children, is the first and the last link in the chain of education and social assistance. It should be there when all other support mechanisms fail.

Whatever the context is (age, sex, social background) outreach worker's presence when a child is going through new experiences, using new services on the ground, etc. is aimed at increasing the self esteem level of the child and building his/her capacities regardless of how excluded the child is from the society.

There is a reason why these children are not on the margins of the society.

They often display some sorts of behavior and skills the society does not understand or accept. Many social services are created in such a way that a child is expected to overcome many obstacles in order to access it (administrative, physical, requested presence of an adult...). For these reasons, it is important for outreach workers to follow the child and provide help, while at the same time respecting and nurturing her/his independence.

As it was already mentioned it is important for an outreach worker to develop empathy. This skill can always be improved. Developing empathy entails active listening, processing of information and understanding. This is in accordance with the child's right to be consulted, heard and understood. Outreach worker should always strive to listen, gather information and develop a plan for the child which is in accord with the child's views.

The relationship which is supposed to be established between an outreach worker and a child or a group of children is of great importance. It is based on the idea that each and every child's capacities and

uniqueness should be recognized and that he/she should be treated as a person who may affect his/her life, growth and development in accordance with the age. Each and every intervention pursued by outreach workers should include aspect of independence of the child and of being in charge of their life. Thus, the interventions should be as transparent and clear to the children as possible, followed by the exchange of experiences, opinions and views.

Apart from this, each outreach worker of the CYI right after joining the program undergoes training on outreach work. This education is an important segment of the work and should not be carried out without the pre-established plan. At the very beginning, outreach workers are introduced to important characteristics and responsibilities of the work with street involved children

Education on outreach work should include acquisition of skills and knowledge so as to ensure quality realization of the following

- a. Evaluation (evaluation of the situation-environment and initial evaluation of the child)
It is necessary for every outreach worker to learn how to conduct evaluation on the ground. It is not a simple task as it incorporates a number of factors which need to be taken into the consideration when assessing, before all, the needs of the child. Evaluation entails obtaining and harmonizing all information acquired from the contact with the child and the environment. Processing and planning of the action should follow. In order for an outreach worker to have information on all relevant aspects for the evaluation, it is recommended to draft a document which could be a guide for evaluation.
- b. Planning intervention
A plan of action entails the response to needs and problems identified on the ground. It is important to clearly prioritize the needs that are to be addressed. It is recommended that the organization which plans to deploy an outreach program to have a relatively normalized system of priorities (related to general safety of the child, health condition, family relations..) so as to make the process of deciding on particular interventions as simple as possible.
- c. Determining the skills and knowledge a particular child is in need of
Children should learn mechanism whose function is to reduce and/or avoid risks. In order for them to do that they need to develop different skills. Outreach workers should also educate children on the street. In order for an outreach worker to determine the areas in which a child needs skill development, he/she should also evaluate capacities, knowledge, skills and affinities of the child. In this way, outreach workers have a chance to build on the existing resources and capacities and to take into account his/her previous experience. It is also important to consider the prejudices a child may have. It is necessary to plan education and capacity building of the outreach workers in the same way as that of the children.
- d. Representing children or a child in the community before citizens, institutions.
- e. Decision making and active participation in the team.
Outreach workers should be good leaders. It is important for them to be acquainted with the methods of planning, phases of the implementation, methods of evaluation, analysis and different methods of networking with other resources in the community.

In the text that follows we propose two models which pertain to the characteristics of the outreach workers which are the widely accepted. One is developed by the WHO while the other was initially developed in Norway.

In order for the outreach work to meet certain quality standards and for the interventions to be effective outreach workers should have the following characteristics:

- Have relevant knowledge, skills and have needed attitude towards the children or problems these children face
- Be motivated to continually learn
- Have integrity, be mature and responsible, patient and sympathetic
- Be ready to make thought-through decisions
- Be creative, resourceful and flexible
- Be ready to work in a team
- Nurture participation and encourage others to make their own decisions
- Believe in empowerment by offering options in which children may recognize themselves and develop their own skills

On the other hand objectives of the outreach work are:

- a. Early intervention; detecting social and health issues within the target group
- b. Participation: ensuring that the voice of the street involved children is widely heard and taken into account in the processes related to development of new policies
- c. Provision of the outreach service when other services fail
- d. Making contacts with the children, motivating and informing them on the other services available in the community
- e. Providing reliable and adapted information and counseling on risky behavior, harm reduction
- f. Gathering information on children, conditions they live in and needs they have
- g. Advocacy in the community with the aim of making administrative and political authorities to take responsibility

Organization which implements activities and works with street involved children should monitor capacity building and needs of its outreach workers, provide them with continuous education but also with oversight. Outreach workers should be provided with education in accordance with the target group they work with and its characteristics (HIV prevention, substance abuse, unwanted pregnancies) in order for them to efficiently and reliably enrich their knowledge, skills and attitudes and transpose it in direct contact with wider population.

Knowledge is in relation with information and understanding of the mentioned principles and facts. It may be internalized through seminars offered by the organizations and institutions which deal with the issues in question, studying of literature on street involved children and of documentation of the organization which implants activities, but also through conversations with children and field experts and community leaders. Outreach workers should have knowledge on analysis and reporting, be acquainted with relevant legislation and understand the system of social protection, judiciary and health care system.

Skills of the outreach workers should be developed so that they can teach others. These skills include assertive communication, conflict resolution, mediation as well as acquisition of practical skills.

Attitudes represent tendency to think and act in a specific way. They include values and beliefs, and may be demonstrated through speech and behavior. If there are prejudices and negative messages the outreach workers haven't resolved themselves there is a chance they may come out in interaction with children (e.g. non-verbal body language). Oversight and nurturing of open communication within a team may help outreach workers to realize prejudices they have and to fight them through further education.

Communication of the outreach workers with the children

It has already been said that inappropriate, unclear, inauthentic and judgmental communication may disturb the relationship between the child and the outreach worker. Good communication is a key for understanding the position of the child and development of the relationship based on mutual trust. Apart from the individual level, communication is of great importance when representing a child before institutions. Communication is a two-way street and includes emitting and receiving information.

Outreach worker should be an example of good communication for the children

Outreach worker should learn to lead a guided conversation with children and to always provide feedback. It is recommended for this kind of communication to be practiced in safe environment at first (with other outreach workers, friends, family, etc.) in order to reduce the number of possible mistakes when in communication with children. Communication consists of three important processes (listening, talking or conversation, feedback). From our experience on the field the most important part is listening. By listening an outreach demonstrates that he/she cares for the child and wants to understand the problems he/she may have. In some instances the sole purpose of the outreach visit is to listen to children. When talking, having conversation, with the child it is important to use the same or similar language to that of a child. It is important to speak concisely, coherently and understandably and to avoid difficult or complicated words or phrases (children will often refrain from showing they do not understand something because they are ashamed, afraid of reaction and of being judged). Communication includes giving feedback. Giving feedback is a good way for children to adopt this technique. Besides mentioned and most commonly used manners of communication, communicating with children in non/verbal way is a necessary part of any visit. If street involved children have learned something it is to recognize many feelings, wishes and hidden motives through gesticulation, mimics, appearance, etc.

That is why it is important for the outreach workers to be aware of their own feelings, unresets and fears when in contact with a child, but also to be honest with them. Dishonesty and discomfort is hard to keep hidden in communication with people for a long time, especially with children. It is important to assess own capacities for honest contact with these children and to be honest with ourselves as well as with other colleagues, team and coordinator and after all that with the child.

In our experience the greatest challenge in making contact with children is building the exclusive relationship between a particular child and an outreach worker. We have already discussed the issue of relationship built on trust, but is important to note that this relationship should not be built on a personal level, i.e. only with the specific worker.

Through outreach the relationship of trust in the program, service or organization should be established.

The message the children should be conveyed is that the service is always available to them, and not a particular worker. This is important because regardless of the dedication and motivation of a particular outreach worker, the organization can not guarantee children their presence at all times. However, it may guarantee adequate and timely response.

This has been on numerous occasions been picked by the outreach workers as the most painful part of working with street involved children, i.e. the knowledge that they are representative of the service and that it is more important that the intervention is offered than them being the one to offer it.

Phases of the outreach

International network of street social workers list five phases of the outreach work. These phases are enlisted in the process of gathering theoretical and practical data for drafting of the methodological handbook for outreach work with marginalized communities. The organization which implements outreach activities for marginalized groups, in this case with street involved children, should identify in which phase it currently is. This allows for evaluation of the activities implemented so far and preparations for launching the next phase of activities. The five phases are:

1. studying of the setting based on theory (historical, social, cultural context) and practice (direct work on the ground which includes gathering information about children, family and local community in which they live and work)
2. the second phase is related to ensuring presence on the ground. It means mapping of the situation and of the location, observing of the location without necessarily establishing contact with children. It takes time for outreach worker to get used to the environment in which he/she will be carrying out activities, as well as for the children to get accustomed to the presence of the outreach worker in their immediate surrounding.
3. The third phase includes identification and introduction. The project, i.e. activities should be presented to children and outreach workers which will be visiting the location introduced. Also the reason for the presence of the outreach workers should be clearly explained to the children.
4. The fourth phase entails establishing the relation with the population based on trust and support. The starting point in this process is probably some sort of distrust towards the outreach workers and the end point should be the situation in which children understand and are convinced of good intentions of each outreach worker.
5. The fifth phase is related to providing support and intervention. The space for interaction with children which may lead to the development of directed and specific activities should be kept open. This phase may have effect on and may be carried out either with a particular child or with a group of children.

The CYI and outreach workers had a chance to go through all five phases. These phases may at times overlap, sometimes you may simultaneously go through several phases and sometimes you may not go through all of the phases. Nevertheless, it is important to be aware of these phases and to attempt to determine in which phase the activities are as they are instrumental in recognizing needs and in a long term, achievement of better results of the outreach work.

Coordinating outreach

It is important to discuss and plan the numbers of hours the outreach workers can dedicate to the program, particularly in light of constant and frequent changes in the lives of street involved children (visits being canceled by children, new information on the location of the child being received, etc.). If the wish is to follow a child's daily life the plan should be adapted to such circumstances. This means that the outreach visits should not be carried out on ad hoc basis, but should be precisely planned with a number

of back up solutions and alternatives. Outreach workers need to be prepared for possible changes in plans and activities. If a number of outreach workers significantly exceed four persons the outreach coordinator should be introduced. Outreach coordinator should ease the process of work and make all the necessary preparations for work on the street. He or she should together with the outreach worker balance the demands of the project (donor) and real needs on the ground.

Outreach coordinator should be a person devoted to values of the outreach work. He/she should be well acquainted with all of the characteristics of the outreach work, should have experience of working with street involved children and understand the characteristics and the needs of the target group. His/her duty is to secure and maintain all the necessary resources needed for outreach (financial means, human resources, continuous education and mentoring), take care of the outreach workers, their safety, risks, professional relation to the program and to children and should manage the outreach service. Outreach coordinator should also be able to utilize media and forge partnerships between organizations; drafts budgets and participate in joint actions with other organizations. As already said, visibility of the outreach work is important, not only among street involved children but in the public as well (citizens, decision makers, etc.).

The task of the outreach coordinator is to successfully inform decision makers and donor who may help and support the program of direct intervention. He/she should also be skilful in assessing the risks and responses and should often consider both the best case and worst case scenarios.

When new outreach workers join the program it is necessary to provide them with training, additional explanations and to introduce them to job at hand. The greatest responsibility for the interventions lies with the coordinator. Since there is a number of risks an outreach worker faces it is important to warn him/her about them and to present them with possible solutions and alternatives. The characteristics and skills of a good coordinator should give outreach workers sense of safety with their team and atmosphere during the meeting should be such as to encourage exchange of lessons learned.

During the evaluation, planning and implementation phase of activities related to the outreach work with street involved children, coordinator should not take all the responsibility. The responsibility should be divided between the outreach coordinator, coordinating and managing team of the organization as well as the outreach workers themselves. When organizing outreach work as a service that can be offered to street involved children a number of issues should be considered and administrative conditions ensured. It is important to consider mental and emotional health of the outreach workers (mentoring meetings, vacations and breaks, enhancing skills and abilities of employees, “fresh blood” on the streets, changing roles and tasks, showing interest in them); quality and dynamics within the team-working in pairs (fixed or rotating partners, relations in the team-either too emotionally attached or having poor relationship); giving time to new outreach workers to adapt to work environment; rulebook and its constant improvement so as to more clearly regulate outreach work; resources needed for carrying out successful outreach work.

Documenting and reporting

Documenting and reporting on the activities the organization is implementing is an important part of the process and serves as the basis for monitoring and evaluation. Furthermore, it serves as the way of communication with other institutions and organizations and may be source of information for people who are joining the program. Many organizations have their own internal procedures for documenting specific activities which are part of the interventions. It is important to mention that there is no universal document which guides documenting and reporting but there are segments of the outreach work which need to be documented.

Distributing material on the ground such as condoms, phone number bracelets, maps of day care centers, information and leaflets on risks affect the development of different forms and types of documenting.

Life on the streets is very eventful. Some children are on the move to other cities, some often change the place of residence while others change the sleeping place on the streets. Some children may be admitted to a shelter and the next day they may be on the streets again. Some organizations keep records or files on each individual beneficiary, record activity on a daily, weekly, monthly or yearly basis. On the other hand, in order to adequately keep information which is gathered reports need to be filed by the team right after the implemented activity and not retroactively.

Even though it is important to spend longer time with the beneficiaries during the outreach visit the length of time spent is not crucial when evaluating the purposefulness of the action. Outreach visit as such, even when it does not entail specific interventions in relation to a particular child, may often be regarded as a successful visit. Such visits remind children that the outreach workers are there for them and that the support is available, and this alone may be regarded to be intervention as well. The idea is to make the outreach worker part of the immediate surrounding, part of the life on the street so that children do not regard them as strangers. Each outreach worker should find his/her place on the streets and sometimes they may go out to the locations without specific and planned intervention in relation to a particular child. Outreach workers keep record on the number of children, their names and activities they had with them. These records often include demographic characteristics of the children, description of physical appearance, health and emotional problems they may have as well as reasons why they are not in contact with the existing institutions (centers for social work, health care centers, etc.)

After years of experience we may say that when reporting questions who, how, when where and why? need to be answered. Reports that are filed need to be short and concise and regularly filled out. It is advisable to write reports right after the outreach visit so as to ensure that the key facts are not left out (name, nickname, age).

When working with street involved children the principle of confidentiality should be observed. Whoever is in contact with the child during the outreach visit or indirectly by reading reports should be very observant that the information remains confidential. It is important to explain to children the meaning of the confidentiality right at the very beginning by explaining to them that the information they provide will stay within the circle of the outreach workers, unless the child's life and health are at immediate risk.

One of the most important policies the CYI developed over the years is the privacy policy. Besides specific demographic data related to a specific child data on a child's previous experiences, his/her family and other children is obtained as well. It is important to have a clear privacy policy in the organization which guides handling of such data including regulations related to situations in which the gather information may be given to third parties.

Following questions should be considered: Should and under what circumstances reports and data be given to the police? Should data be released to social services? Should the families have access to such data? Should the children have access to their personal files (or documents that contain the data)? In what manner is information revealed within the organization?

It is necessary to have clearly defined procedures in order not to violate the policy of the protection of privacy.

Is the organization obligated to report this information according to the country laws? Is the organization under obligation to report to someone that it collects personal data? Does organization have a right to collect such data? Are there any specific regulations on handling of personal data?

Besides agreeing on the policy of the protection of personal data and its implementation, it is important for the organization to bind the outreach workers with a written document not to reveal information. The CYI has designed a document called “confidentiality statement” which determines obligation of the outreach workers to keep personal information secret and not to reveal it to third persons or institutions. This also covers specific experiences children have as well as photographs taken during outreach visits. Outreach worker by signing this document consents not to reveal such information during his/her work as well as during the three year period after the termination of the engagement with the CYI.

It is important that the confidentiality statements need to be signed when we bring a third party to the outreach visit (journalists, other organization, social worker, donor). In this situation it is necessary to inform children of the visit and to ask for their permission. If they do not consent, the CYI outreach workers do not organize the visit. Children may refuse such visits for number of reasons and those reasons should be investigated. In our experience, the reasons were mostly the fact that the relationship of trust was still not established and that further interventions are needed in relation to the child-outreach program relationship. If a child consents to visit by the third person, that person needs to sign the confidentiality statement and children should be informed that such statement was signed.

In the text that follows an example of the outreach report form is provided:

Date of the outreach visit	
Name of the outreach workers	
Arrival/departure time	
Location	
Description of the location/old or new	
Objective of the outreach visit¹	1. Catering of basic needs (food, drinks, personal hygiene supplies etc.) 2. Contact aimed at profiling target group and location 3. Taking children to other institution (Center for social work, Health care center, etc.) 4. Initiating targeted activities (workshops, conversation, etc.) aimed at prevention and risk reduction 5. Referring/informing on existing services (Dropin Center, Outreach, PP, CSR, MUP) and providing technical and emotional support during the Outreach 6. Research endeavour (focus groups, questionnaires, interview, polling, tests, etc.)
Number of condoms distributed	
Taking children to VCCT - number	
Health examination -number	
Number of flyers distributed	
Center for social work - number	
Was the objective accomplished, if not why?	YES NO
Notes²	

¹ It is mandatory to provide further explanation of the objective of the outreach visit

² Authentic children's statements, additional explanations of the objective of the outreach visit. Which techniques were used to accomplish the objective e.g. for the objective NO. 2 used observation, conversation, gathering of additional data on the beneficiary, concerns related to location, recategorization of the street involving children – brief notes (bullet points) on each chosen objective..

Name of the beneficiary³ /cide/category/age/ sex/ documentation / first outreach contact? /has he/she ever visited Dropoi in center,PP/ the way in which beneficiary is contacted	Physical description, description of behavior, perceived emotional state and attitudes (views, beliefs, basic life philosophy, etc.)

Name and Surname of the beneficiary	Undertaken measures, interventions	Undertaken measures, interventions

Name of the beneficiary	Beneficiaries' attitude towards the system and of the system towards him (past/ present)/facts which lead to such attitudes.

³ It is required to provide complete information

Section V

Cooperation with the community



Cooperation with the community

Street involved children are **part of the community**. This community is comprised of many actors, such as outreach workers, social workers, their families, neighborhood as well as organizations and institutions they encounter on a daily basis.

Many services which are offered to children are not really accessible. Children often run into obstacles when trying to contact the institutions.

Community is the resource which may either be the solution or a problem which further aggravate the position of the street involved children.

The vision of the organization which implements outreach work, in this case of the CYI, is building of the community in which each and every child, and especially street involved child, will be recognized and his/her needs fulfilled.

Outreach workers, who are at the same time representatives of the community and persons of trust in the lives of street involved children, have the responsibility to communicate to the public the issues and problems this population faces. These issues should be highly regarded by everyone in the community.

Outreach workers are often the only ones who can testify about conditions street involved children are. For this reason it is important for the problems not remain hidden from the eyes of the public. It is important to raise the visibility, initiate change of the attitude of the public and develop solutions for problems street involved children encounter.

In order to engage community in the process of problem solving it is necessary to understand what community is comprised of. It is necessary to know which institutions and organizations are relevant for the issue, as well as their attitude towards street involved children. It is necessary to understand which institutions have jurisdiction in particular issues and plan the best way to approach them.

Outreach workers need to be acquainted to all relevant regulations which are in force. As it was already mentioned, the Convention on the rights of the child is the main source which defines responsibilities of the states that ratified this document. Street involved children have the same rights as all the other children and should be able to exercise them. Apart from the Convention, an organization which works with street involved children should also be aware of the relevant legal framework. Street involved children are often in conflict with the law and its representatives-the police. There are instances when the outreach worker is in communication with the police on the ground, which may at times be an uncomfortable situation. Children should be better explained the role of the police, but police officers should also be acquainted with the problems street involved children encounter.

It is advisable to meet the local authorities and police, to form some sort of alliance and to represent children if the conflict between the police and a child arises. Many outreach reports speak of the outreach workers' experience with the police. Sometimes, the police officers are suspicious of the activities the CYI implements on the ground, so it is important, for reasons of safety, for the outreach workers to know laws and regulations which are relevant to their work on the street. There are many protocols and bylaws which regulate police activities on the ground, define conditions under which an officer may stop and question a child, enter the place these children inhabit, determine the length and conditions for being apprehended, define their rights of intervention in cases of gathering, etc.

In our experience, the biggest step forward has been made when it comes to relations between the children and the police. Also, conditions in which these children live and violence they are exposed to request for sound relations with the police so as to secure safety of the children.

Mobilizing the community

In the first place, community should be informed about the problems the street involved children face. After that further work is required to motivate community to recognize and timely react to the needs of street involved children.

During its operations the CYI has insisted that it is the right and the responsibility of all citizens in the community to actively participate and contribute to creation of the mechanisms for improving the quality of life of the street involved children.

It is a precondition that the community is informed. Each organization and outreach workers should develop strategy and channels of communication with the community.

Communication with the community on behalf of street involved children is an important part of the outreach work. The CYI outreach workers have had a chance to represent children on many instances. Street involved children may often be in conflict with a doctor at the health care institution, a social worker, a person passing by or some other persons. The role of the outreach worker is to be the mediator in these conflicts.

This needs to be understood as regular part of the work the outreach worker conducts. When in contact with children outreach workers should be a role model on how these children should be treated.

Media (newspapers, radio, television and internet) are powerful tools which can be used to inform and educate wider public on the problems street involved children face. Thus, it is important that the organization which organizes the outreach program is in contact with media and that it builds relations its own capacities for public speaking.

Writing an appeal, complaint or an application (depending on which authority is being addressed) on threats to children's rights is a channel of communication with the institutions and authorities.

Any system of government on the local and national level has built channels of communication with citizens through the current protocols and regulations. Policies and procedures exist in the service of protecting the rights and dignity of persons, in this case children. Outreach workers and organizations that implement the program should be introduced to these procedures. This formal method of communication with the community will make the situation that may occurred to be formally recorded, public and to require a response by the institution. Children should be informed if on their behalf or in connection with them, an appeal, complaint or application is submitted, and in addition consent should be asked from the children (or adults interested in the child lives such as family) for this type of intervention. Also, it is important for an organization that conducts activities to be clear that it will then submit the name of the child in this type of application and should consistently adhere to the principle of protecting the best interests of the child.

Further, it is important to survey the work of all relevant civil society organizations which work with similar problems and which represent the rights of the vulnerable groups. They may be a source of support and help in establishing contacts and later in negotiating with the authorities. At the same time, cooperation with other stakeholders in the community allows for wider support system street involved children need to be built.

Thorough various public events the CYI has succeeded in mobilizing the public and the community to make work with children more successful. The formula for success is not simple. It involves dedication to communicating with stakeholders, information available to citizens and continuous learning process.

An organization which wishes to animate the community to engage in solving some particular problem can not be isolated from the community.

Networking with other organizations, institutions, media, supporting other activities and relentlessness in efforts to achieve a specific goal are the necessary ingredients of the successful mobilization of the public.

The CYI has successfully presented that the situation in which street involved children are is not supposed to be endured by anyone. It has made possible for each citizen to identify with the situation in which these children are. It has clearly articulated the issue but also the solution.

When working with the community it is important to adhere to the values that are being promoted. If we expect solidarity from the citizens with street involved children the organization need to express solidarity when it comes to other social problems. If an organization calls upon institutions to be responsible towards street involved children, it should also hold institutions accountable in relation to other violations of human rights and discrimination. However, it is important to be careful not create confusion in the public about the nature of the organization and issues it mainly deals with (whether it works with street involved children, elderly or ecology).

Publishing brochures, leaflets and short publications about the work of the organization is a good way to inform the public on the problems street involved children face. The CYI did not produce a lot of such material as it had been guided by the principle that resources should be directed where they are most needed-direct help and support to street involved children. However, it does not mean that printed material should not be produced, but that a particular care should paid to what kind of resources we have and how much we can set aside for this purpose.

Organizing meetings with relevant representatives of other organizations, networks and institutions with the aim of introducing them to the goals of the outreach work should be a continuous activity of the organization.

Other support programs offered by the CYI

Since the opening of the Drop in center the CYI has developed a series of programs based on needs or the risks street involved children are exposed to. Each program incorporates a group of outreach workers which provide support.

In some instances planned activities can not be implemented and additional efforts are needed to motivate children to participate. As we have already mentioned, the first contact with children is made by the outreach workers. In order for any program to take ground children need to be informed about it. If a particular problem can not be resolved at the premises of the program, outreach workers should visit the location at which children are. They try to find out why children sometimes do not show up and what may be an obstacle for them to participate in offered activities, etc.

For these reasons, it is important to have a continuous and developed communication between each program of the organization.

In the beginning, the CYI had developed the outreach program as a method for working with children, and later as the support to stationed programs, i.e. specific activity within the framework of other programs. In the last couple of years the CYI outreach work is being developed as a freestanding service which starts and ends in the field.

An organization interested in developing outreach programs may, depending on the characteristics of the community, available resources as well as number of children and quality of their life, choose to develop the outreach work either as a support to other programs or as a free standing and separate service.

HIV and HCV Prevention Program. This program is educational in character and it is intended for street involved adolescents who are at greatest risk from exposure to HIV and HCV. Themes covered by workshops are agreed upon with the beneficiaries or are planned according to the most common risks the beneficiaries are exposed to.

Even though they are at risk of HIV infection, there was no program available to children and adolescents which could provide them with information on prevention measures up to 2009. Today, over 65 % of the beneficiaries of this program know how to protect themselves from infection. Outreach workers visit locations and hand out materials (condoms, bracelets, leaflets and other important information) on a daily basis.

Education is the most efficient way to include children into the society. If a support system in education process is provided to children at very early age the chances for social inclusion are greatly increased. The CYI has developed the Education Program which is based on daily support to children who attend preparatory education programs. Children from the *Drop in centre* and from one of the informal settlements with predominantly Roma population have been covered by this program for the last three years. Children who completed preparatory education with this kind of support have continued to attend classes and to be in contact with the education program.

In 2009 fourteen kids from an informal settlement from the Palilula municipality have been enrolled and have successfully completed preparatory school program and are now second grade students in regular schools. In 2010 fifty six children were included in this program and are now first grade. In 2011 thirty kids have been attending preparatory classes which adhere to principles of inclusion. Method on which this program is based is outreach work. All activities are implemented with the help of the volunteer outreach workers.

Magazine “Face of the Street”. The CYI together with two other organizations has started publishing a magazine modeled after the street newspapers “Big Issue”⁵⁷ published in Great Britain. The magazine is being sold by the members of the marginalized groups. It is being published monthly and it is functioning as a social entrepreneurship endeavor. Ten adolescents which are beneficiaries of the CYI programs were selected to participate in the process of selling/distribution. They have been trained to sell newspapers and manage money. By participating in this program these adolescents are learning to be responsible and independent. Supervision of their work is being carried out through the activities of the outreach workers.

Day care centre - In October 2010 the CYI has launched a program on the territory of New Belgrade which has the highest number of informal settlements. Day care center is intended for street involved children up to 15 years of age who reside or work on the territory of New Belgrade municipality. Over 70 % of the beneficiaries of the Daycare center attend schools or preparatory schools.

Outreach Program has continuously been evolving and enhancing its capacities together with the CYI programs. It has developed teams equipped with specific knowledge and skills, particularly for dealing with children exposed to risk of HIV and HCV infection as well as to support children who are identified to be or at risk to become victims or of trafficking in human beings.

57 <http://www.bigissue.com/>

Volunteer Service is program designed to give opportunity to the community, students citizens and companies to be engaged with the activities the CYI implements. The message being sent by this program is that everyone can contribute to improve the situation in which street involved children are. Since it was established this program has included over 600 volunteers which devote to the program on average 6000 hours a year.

Conclusion

Street involved children were almost never visited prior to 2005. They were mostly visited by the police and to lesser extent representatives of the centers for social work. In the evaluation⁵⁸ of achievement of the Drop in Center which was financed by the Fund for social innovation in 2008 and which had outreach work as one of the most important activities, it was emphasized that: „**this project is a little like street involved children themselves-very resilient to all negative circumstances and capable to survive and grow.**“

Today, the CYI outreach workers make over 50 contacts with street involved children weekly, while 90% of the contacted children visit program within the next two weeks or with outreach workers addresses institutions which can address their needs. Street involved children, together with outreach workers visit schools, hospitals, health care centers, cinemas, theaters, family, and shelters, go for excursions, to the police...

In the last seven years The CYI has relentlessly worked on improving the position of street involved children. Even though our programs, and particularly the Outreach program, have yielded results in providing needed support to children, in the early stages the CYI did not have enough resources or support to make the support accessible.

The outreach workers had a chance to work with large number of children who due to cruelty of life and lack of a unique systemic response to their needs are not living among us any more. Some others, which were more resilient, survived, but are still at great health risk today and the support is still not available to them.

In our work we are often asked How many children did you remove from the street?

Risks to which these children are exposed demand coordinated, planned, continuous and inter-sector cooperation so as to “remove a child from the street”. It demands time and financial resources for prevention and direct treatment.

This kind of support is still not developed enough in Serbia.

58 Evaluations was carried out by Professor Jasna Hrnčić, Faculty of Political Science of the University of Belgrade.

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